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ABSTRACT

Reading represents the single most important tool for teaching students "how to learn" across the curriculum, and the time has come to encourage widespread development of undergraduate reading degree programs for future teachers. Ten years ago, Eastern Washington University began offering Reading Education as an undergraduate major for elementary teaching candidates and as a minor for secondary teaching candidates. Reading majors are required to take 37 credit hours in various specialized areas, such as children's literature or reading in the content areas. This coursework, offered sequentially and developmentally, gives teaching candidates the opportunity to learn theory, conduct research, and apply coursework to actual classroom situations. At the end of the three years, students are competent in (1) identifying student abilities, (2) textbook analysis, (3) alternative teaching methods, (4) differentiated assignments, (5) small group activities, and (6) instructional and learning theory. Because their knowledge transcends content areas, elementary teachers prepared to teach reading are also perceived as instructional leaders by many schools and districts. Despite a trend toward district and state guidelines and a requisite loss of teacher authority in the classroom, schools of education should not be dissuaded from considering the development of an undergraduate reading major. (HTH)

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EMPOWERING STUDENTS THROUGH READING

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If "learning how to learn" is the most important subject matter of 20th Century schools, then the time has come to encourage the widespread development of undergraduate reading degree programs for future teachers.

For now and the foreseeable future, reading represents the major route to learning in advanced societies. It is the single most important tool for teaching students "how to learn" across the curriculum. The reading major should therefore prepare teachers for a wide range of leadership positions in their classrooms, school buildings, districts and states. In turn, teachers prepared in the discipline of reading instruction can empower their students to "learn how

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to learn." The reading instruction teacher represents the essential link in America's desire to create "A Nation of Readers."

Unfortunately, only 3 to 5 percent of America's institutions of teacher education offer a reading major to undergraduate students. Most teaching candidates study other content areas. Undergraduates preparing for secondary-level teaching may not be required to experience even one reading instruction class.

In its Becoming A Nation of Readers report, the Commission on Reading said, "Teacher education programs should be lengthened and improved in quality. Prospective elementary teachers do not acquire an adequate base in either the liberal arts and sciences or in pedagogy. They get only a fleeting introduction to the knowledge required for teaching reading."

As a result, schools of education are producing teachers who cannot be expected to understand how reading instruction skills can strengthen teaching methods, much less to share a full range of reading instruction with their students. Reading instruction has become the preserve of "reading specialists" with master's or doctor's degrees. Beyond the elementary grades, diagnostic skills and remedial reading instruction take precedence over developmental classroom reading instruction.

Ten years ago, Eastern Washington University began offering Reading Education as an undergraduate major for elementary teaching candidates, and as an undergraduate minor for secondary teaching candidates. The availability of an undergraduate reading major at this institution has created a positive cycle of benefits for our students, the districts that hire our students, the department of education, and the university.

In a recent survey of Eastern Washington University-area school district personnel directors, or those in hiring positions, the possession of a reading degree was unanimously rated as a "critical" or "high priority" factor in the screening of kindergarten through third grade teaching candidates. Surprisingly, it was also rated highly in the selection of 9th through 12th grade teaching candidates as well.

For example, Arcadia Elementary School principal Win Pierson, of the Deer Park, WA school district, said: "I feel very strongly that the reading major is a very desirable background for a candidate to have. People with that background can diagnose reading problems across the curriculum, and have some techniques for correcting those problems. They possess what I call an enriched way of teaching children. I see a marked difference."

Terry Weinmann, Personnel Director for the West Valley (Spokane) school district, says: "In a small school

district like ours, teachers are asked to move around, to teach in minor areas or change grade levels from year to year. They must have transferable skills. We feel that our reading teachers are more effective teachers in the content areas as well."

How do reading majors differ from their traditional counterparts at the end of undergraduate coursework? What skills do they possess that other classroom teachers don't? These are the crucial questions in "selling" a reading major to a university.

At Eastern Washington University, reading majors are required to take 37 (quarter) credit hours in reading. Areas of specialization are: children's literature, reading in diverse cultures, reading methods, reading in the content areas, individualized reading, and remedial reading. Included in the 37-credit total are seven hours of reading observation, reading laboratory and a reading practicum in which teaching candidates work directly with students. In addition, students elect six hours from a range of elective offerings. (See appendix for a full list of elective subjects).

This coursework, offered sequentially and developmentally, gives teaching candidates the opportunity to learn theory, to conduct research and to apply coursework to actual classroom situations over a three-year

period. At the end of that time. students are competent in the following areas:

Identification of Student Abilities. Teaching candidates learn to assess student achievement levels and abilities and to prescribe learning strategies on an individual basis. Candidates must demonstrate their competency in matching instructional methods to student needs.

Textbook Analysis. A full range of basal readers are analyzed for content and instructional methods. Candidates learn how to supplement various textbooks with teacher-made materials, commercial materials, and student activities. Candidates learn how to blend teaching methods with various basal approaches.

Alternative Teaching Methods. Candidates learn how to adapt various reading and content area materials to student needs.

Productive Questioning. Based on research and test results, our candidates learn how to structure oral and written questions for maximum student learning.

Differentiated Assignments. Candidates are given a variety of strategies for differentiating assignments for various ability levels within the classroom.

Small Group Activities. Candidates learn a number of methods for small group instruction and small group activities. Such methods have demonstrably improved our

candidates' abilities to manage classroom discipline. activities and learning.

Instructional and Learning Theory. Candidates are exposed to the latest research findings related to how people learn and retain information. Candidates become aware of sources of information and on-going research.

These areas of competency turn our teaching candidates into classroom teachers who are flexible enough to work in a great variety of teaching situations at a number of grade levels. Because reading instruction can be applied to every content area, such classroom teachers show students how to prepare for learning, how to question, and how to evaluate and analyze the materials they see, hear, or read. Reading teachers in the content areas therefore show students how to be independent learners. In short, their students learn how to learn.

Because their knowledge transcends content areas, elementary teachers prepared to teach reading are also perceived as instructional leaders by many schools and school districts. And, because our coursework emphasizes analysis and evaluation, our teaching candidates are asked to utilize independent thinking skills from the beginning of their reading major.

Unfortunately, as teachers they are not always allowed to use the leadership skills they develop as undergraduates. Recent reports in the Phi Delta Kappan and Education Week

point out that classroom teachers in general are losing authority over the content of the material they teach and the methods they employ in classroom instruction.

A 1980 study conducted by the California Department of Education dramatically illustrated the impact delivered by a loss of authority. In that study, evaluators were sent to the school districts scoring the highest and lowest on statewide reading achievement tests. They found that the schools in which teachers had a voice in the selection of the reading program and in which they were not rigorously restricted to prescribed manuals had the highest achievers, regardless of the community's economic conditions or ethnic makeup. In schools achieving the lowest scores, exactly opposite teaching conditions existed.

The trend toward a loss of authority on the part of classroom teachers represents a great loss of human potential and expertise to local school districts; and even more so when the subjects, textbooks and methods employed by reading teachers are prescribed by district or state guidelines. When teachers who have learned to effectively individualize instruction are inhibited by the strictures of mass education methods, it becomes clear that various sectors of the educational system are at odds with one another. However, this fact should not dissuade schools of education from exploring the possibility of developing and offering a reading major.

Why have so few schools of education developed and adopted undergraduate reading majors? At Eastern Washington University, the degree development process consumed four years. University resistence centered around fears that the degree would represent a watered-down version of existing masters and doctoral reading programs, or duplicate coursework in fields such as English or language arts. Others perceived the introduction of a reading major as a de-emphasis of academic vigor.

Such fears were answered one by one. For example, Dr. Janet Norby, former co-chair of the Eastern Washington University Reading Committee comments: "When you teach reading you are teaching a process and, in this case, you are teaching how to teach a process. You are also dealing with values in a very subtle but explicit way. The whole concept of reading instruction is abstract and requires advanced abstract thinking skills. We find the more intellectual the student, the better he or she does in the reading major."

Research has added significantly to a growing body of knowledge concerning initial and developmental reading skills. In addition, researchers around the world are concentrating on the human brain, and much of their research has implications for the field of reading. Reading and learning research is becoming a discipline in itself.

Finally, the Eastern Washington University reading major emphasizes preparation for classroom teaching. It is

not a specialist's, therapist's or administrative degree program, although it does provide a solid introduction to reading theory and practice for those who wish to pursue advanced degrees at a later date. For example, of the 11 required courses and 12 possible electives, all relate directly to the content of reading and to the skills necessary to translate those learnings into classroom activities.

In "Becoming a Nation of Readers" Richard C. Anderson, director of the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of ILlinois, said: "America will become a nation of readers when the verified practices of the best teachers in the best schools can be introduced throughout the country."

We agree with Anderson. Methods of effective instruction are already known, and the methods for showing students how to learn have been available for years. However, for "a nation of readers" to become a reality, large numbers of teacher well-versed in the methods of reading instruction must become available to our educational system.

Without such teachers, American education will continue to serve its students poorly, utilizing methods that only partially develop their potential to become global learners. With such teachers, American students can take their places in the 21st Century fully empowered with the ability to "learn how to learn."

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APPENDIX
THE ELEMENTARY READING MAJOR

I COURSES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Courses

The Elementary Reading Major requires completion of the courses listed below and those selected from the list of electives with a minimum grade point average of 2.5 and no less than a 2.0 in any course.

Pre-requisite Courses	Title	Hrs. Credit
Ed 304	Introduction to Reading	3
Ed 488	Lab in Learning-Reading	1
Ed 490	Reading Methods in the Elem. School	3

	Course No.	Title	Hrs. Credit
Required Courses	Ed 301	Field Experiences in Reading Instruction	3
	LSc 420	Children's Literature	3
	Ed 390	Teaching Reading in Diverse Cultures	3
	Ed 487	Developmental Reading for Middle/Secondary Schools	3
	Ed 491	Teaching Reading in the Content Areas	3
	Ed 493	Individualized Reading	3
	Ed 494	Introduction to Remedial Reading	3
	Ed 495	Reading Practicum	3

An additional six hours must be selected from the list of electives below

	Course No.	Title	Hrs. Credit
Elective Courses	Ed 362	Development of Higher Level Thinking Strategies	3
	Ed 368	Expanding the Basal Reading Program	1
	*Ed 468	Beginning Instructional Theory Into Practice	3-4
	Ed 483	Workshop in Reading	3
	**Ed 497	Workshops, Short Courses, or Conferences	Arr.
	Com 414	Storytelling	3
	Eng 260	Introduction to Language	4
	Eng 391	Teaching of English in Elementary School	4
	LSc 430	Adolescent Literature	3
	Spa 301	Introduction to Speech Pathology	5
	Spa 454	Language Development in the Normal Child	3
	Thr 326	Creative Dramatics	3

*Ed 468. Beginning ITIP, will be approved as an elective in the Reading Major provided: (1) the student has obtained a written note from the instructor of Ed 468 stating that all class assignments will be completed in the area of reading. (2) the dated note was obtained prior to the beginning of the course and given to the advisor to be placed in the student's file. (3) the note described above, is in the student's file at the time approval is sought (major-minor form).

**Only selected Ed 497 workshops, short courses, or conferences will be approved as electives in the Reading Major. Students who intend to use such courses in the Reading Major should consult their advisors.

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